

October 15, 2004

District Health Out of Influenza Vaccine and Cancels Mass Vaccination Exercise

South Central District Health has canceled its mass vaccination exercise scheduled for Saturday, October 23, 2004. District Health was going to provide the 250 volunteers with free flu vaccinations, but the nationwide flu vaccine shortage and requests from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) to not use the vaccine for such exercises forced the decision. Those who have already volunteered to participate and are in the high-risk category are being called by SCDH staff to schedule them into current flu clinics.

Additionally, SCDH will no longer take appointments for flu vaccinations. The 6000 doses of flu vaccine SCDH received have either been given, or are scheduled to be given to those in the high-risk group.

District Health reminds people that it is especially important now with the shortage to follow preventive measures to protect themselves from getting influenza or spreading it to others. Preventive measures include:

- Use proper hand washing techniques, especially before eating or after being out in the public;
- Stay home from work or school if you are sick;
- Cover your mouth if you are sniffing, sneezing or coughing;
- Do not share eating utensils, drinking glasses, towels, or other personal items;
- Refrain from visiting nursing homes or anyplace where someone with a chronic illness resides if you have flu-like symptoms;
- Avoid people who may be sneezing or coughing. After visiting public places, avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth until you have washed your hands; and
- Get plenty of rest, exercise, and eat healthy

The CDC and Aventis Pasteur are working on a plan for nationwide redistribution of the 22.4 million doses of unshipped vaccine to identified areas of need throughout the country. About 14.2 million doses of vaccine will be allocated over the next 6-8 weeks through Aventis Pasteur contracts directly to high-priority vaccine providers, including hospitals, long-term care facilities, nursing homes, and private providers who care for young children. The Idaho Division of Health is compiling information for CDC on Idaho's unmet need. SCDH will announce any additional vaccine availability once informed by CDC and the Division of Health, but will not make appointments until an actual amount, if any, is known. Although the supply of vaccine for 6 to 23 month olds has not arrived at SCDH, CDC has assured that all Providers who ordered doses will receive them.

CDC will continue to work with Aventis Pasteur and state and local health departments to identify people, by region, on the vaccination priority list. The approximately 8.2 million doses remaining after the first phase is completed will be shipped to other high-need areas.

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After half of the nation's anticipated influenza vaccine supply was pulled from distribution last week due to manufacturing problems at vaccine-maker Chiron's plant in England, South Central District Health began accepting for vaccination only people who met "high-risk" criteria set out by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Those at most risk for complications from influenza are young children, the elderly, and those with chronic medical conditions, such as congestive heart failure, asthma, or diabetes.

Machala said that there still may be a few private entities in the community that have influenza vaccine available and District Health is counting on them to screen people and only vaccinate those individuals who meet the CDC's high-risk criteria.

Individuals at high-risk of complications from influenza include:

- All children aged 6-23 months,
- Adults aged 65 years or over,
- Persons aged 2-64 years with underlying chronic medical conditions,
- All women who will be pregnant during influenza season,
- Residents of nursing homes and long-term care facilities,
- Children 6 months to 18 years of age on chronic aspirin therapy,
- Health-care workers with direct patient care, and
- Out-of-home caregivers and household contacts of children less than 6 months of age.